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MINNESOTA SPICE

SEEKING HEAT IN THE MILD MIDWEST



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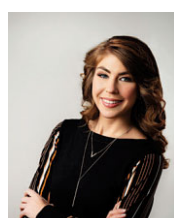
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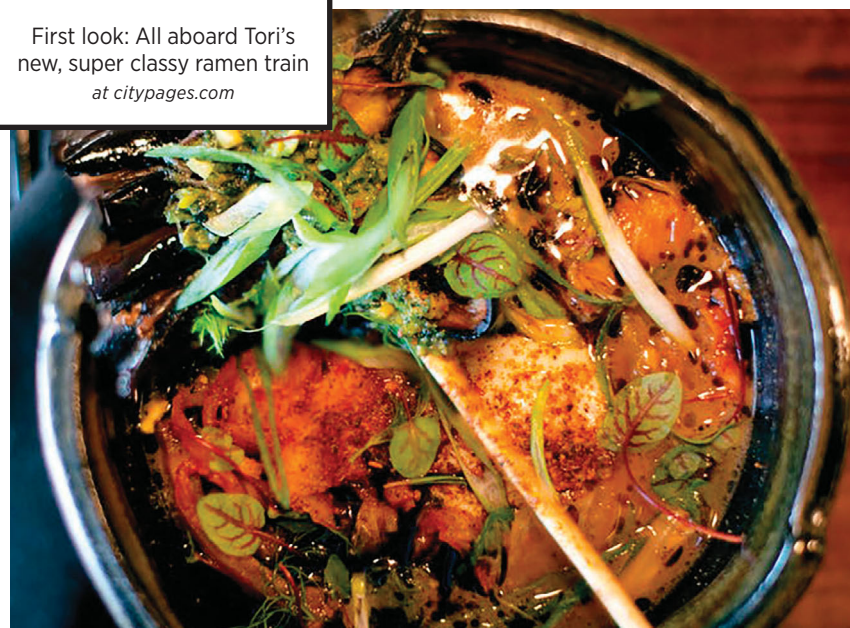
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THE SHORTLIST

First look: All aboard Tori's new, super classy ramen train
at citypages.com



ELLE HALLS

THE STAT SHEET

20,000

Attendees at Kobe Bryant's L.A. memorial

56%

Approval rating for Gov. Tim Walz, per... another Star Tribune/MPR poll

51%

Registered MN voters who support legal pot, per a new Star Tribune/MPR poll

19,000

Real ID applications coming in every week—remember folks, that deadline is Oct. 1

“A billionaire opens an office where a small business used to be. Appropriate.”

Reader Alexander DeMarco responds to “State of the Union: Former Muddy Pig becomes Bloomberg’s St. Paul field office?” at citypages.com

CORONAVIRUS.

IS IT TIME TO START WORRYING about the global Coronavirus spread? On Tuesday, the Center for Disease control warned Americans that an outbreak here is likely: “We are asking the American public to prepare for the expectation that this might be bad,” a CDC official told the New York Times. They’re saying it’s more a matter of when than if at this point, even as the spread of the virus slows in China, as more and more cases are being reported throughout Europe and the Middle East. It’s sickened more than 80,000 people in 33 countries so far—but keep in mind, the survival rate is around 98 percent.

POPULAR STORIES

AT CITYPAGES.COM

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Republican tells Minneapolis Mayor **JACOB FREY** ‘Don’t touch me’

Marshall residents threaten to sue over school’s **LGBTQ PRIDE FLAG**

It’s hard to watch **AMY KLOBUCHAR** not name the president of Mexico

PUPPY LOVE

Proposed law would ban selling dogs and cats at pet shops

In November 2018, the Worth County Sheriff's Department and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) got a permit to search a dog breeding facility on the Minnesota-Iowa border. There, they found a huge, heartbreaking mess.

About 170 Samoyeds—known for their cloud-like fur and teddy bear-like faces—were huddled in cold, broken-down kennels with dirt floors. Their pelts were matted with mud and feces. Many of them hadn't been properly socialized and had become jittery and solitary.

The Samoyeds were put into temporary housing and given medical exams, behavioral evaluations, and lots of love and treats. This kind of out-of-control breeding situation is discovered from time to time, and it doesn't always end so well for the dogs.

"In Minnesota, you'll sometimes find mills with 200, 700, even 900 dogs in a single

facility," Sen. Karla Bigham (D-Cottage Grove) says. Bigham's got a couple of rescue dogs at home, and this issue is personal to her. She and Rep. Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn (D-Eden Prairie) are trying to put puppy and kitty mills out of business with some new legislation.

It wouldn't be the first time the Minnesota Legislature has tried to crack down on puppy mills by regulating the breeding side of the operation. This proposal comes at the issue from the other side, and would outlaw selling dogs and cats at pet shops.

"What this is going to do is prevent those puppy and kitty mills from having an end sale," Bigham says. The hope is that eliminating pet shop sales cuts into the mills' bottom lines, while sending potential pet owners to shelters instead.

Bigham's bill would still let you get a kitten at a Chuck and Don's, provided it was because the store was, for example, hosting



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

an adoption event with the Humane Society. You could also still buy your designer French bulldogs, hunting dogs, and adorably dopey corgis from a reputable breeder. You'd just have to cut out the middleman and buy from the breeder directly.

So far, Bigham says, the bill hasn't

encountered any opposition, and plenty of rescue organizations are eager to get on board. Three states—Maryland, California, and Maine—have similar laws in place, according to KSTP, while local ordinances are on the books in Roseville, Eden Prairie, and St. Paul. —HANNAH JONES

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Grand Catch

The Malevolent Seven

7 DISHES THAT WILL KICK YOUR TONGUE'S ASS

By reputation, the Minnesota diner's relationship with spice begins and ends with saying "when" to a server grinding pepper onto a salad.

Maybe we deserve that. Think of the ubiquitous Bloody Mary beer-back, or the fact that Amy Klobuchar spices up her hot dish by adding both pepperjack cheese and garlic.

Those admissions aside, the Twin Cities has plenty of places that can get a little

steam rising off your tongue. Most employ ingredients and recipes that originated far from the mild, milky Midwest, from cultures where spice is as essential a culinary consideration as salt, heat, and time.

For centuries, people crossed oceans and mountains, traversed deserts, even killed each other, over spices. Now you only need a bike or bus pass and a sense of adventure to get them. Below,

find seven Twin Cities restaurants and signature dishes that bring just the right amount of heat—and then some.

by **MIKE MULLEN**

photos by *Alma Guzman*
tablecloths from
Hunt & Gather

LITTLE SZECHUAN

Mala Hot Pot

A little intimidated by hot pot? That's fair! There's a lot going on here. Here's where we'd start: Spring for Little Szechuan's \$32 all-you-can-eat option, then order two

broths, one savory, one spicy. You might as well make the latter choice the Mala—a distinctive, citrusy Szechuan pepper dish known for the oddly pleasing numbing effect the peppers have on your tongue. Order a combination of items from various sections—say: lamb, bok choy, wood ear mushroom, and lusciously squishy fish balls—and simmer some in each side of the pot, spooning or stabbing when you're ready for another bite. Repeat many times, noticing how different broths flavor different ingredients (and vice versa). Bring



close friends. You'll be here a while, and you don't want to go sharing drool and spice-sweat with just anyone. 422 University Ave. W., St. Paul

PIMENTO JAMAICAN KITCHEN

Kingston Style Jerk Chicken with Kill Dem Wid It! sauce

The base ingredients here—mildly seasoned chicken (roasted bone-in), plantains, diced veggies, and a bed of rice—are nothing to cry about, until you throw in the delightfully named hot... substance. To call Kill Dem Wid It! a "sauce" is a misnomer. This here is a gel, a pitch-black distillation of habanero, lime, and soy sauce flavors that oozes, menacingly, and brings to mind the putrefied remains of a particularly nasty *Ghostbusters* villain. A little goes a long way: Drop one dab on a mouthful to get a sense of its awesome power. Use too much, and you won't know if you're chewing chicken or your napkin—and trust us, you'll need one to wipe the tears from your eyes. 2524 Nicollet Ave. S., Minneapolis

LA TAPATIA

Torta Ahogada

The signature sandwich at this narrow Roseville establishment is a celebration of richness. Golden-brown flakes of carnitas are wedged between avocado slices and refried beans, all held perilously in a buttery, crunchy baguette. La Tapatia serves its Torta Ahogada with a savory tomato sauce, which you should drink down like the tasty little cup of soup it resembles. Move on to the three salsas in squeeze bottles. Apply the brilliantly red homemade salsa picante, a smooth, peppery tomato blend that binds the little carnitas bits together. With fatty flavors top to bottom, no amount of salsa can steal the show, as layers just keep fusing into smoother, smoldering bites. 1237 Larpenneur Ave. W., Roseville

GRAND CATCH

Shrimp Boil, Awesome Sauce, "Insane Ghost" level

Awesome Sauce's pleasant, silly-sounding name indicates it combines garlic butter

and Cajun-inspired "Louisiana" flavors. Order it at the Insane Ghost heat level, the highest of five available at Grand Catch, and you will, indeed, feel like you lost your mind, and then perished, but without losing your appetite. Beware the thin crimson broth pool beneath your shellfish. It's like lava. So why did I catch myself dragging Texas toast and spinning a half-ear of corn in that wicked liquid? Because this is about as high in Scoville units as you can get without sacrificing taste for torment. There's a garlicky, tangy, fishy depth here, one so gorgeous you'd happily spend your last conscious moments etching its glory onto the inner wall of a volcano. 1672 Grand Ave., St. Paul

BANGKOK THAI DELI

Larb Glass Noodle Salad

Let's say you want a taste-packed lunch that won't send you to your afternoon meeting sleepy and sweating chili sauce. Bangkok's larb salad is bright and light and green all over, thanks to mint, cilantro, green onion, cabbage, lettuce, and lime. Plate ratios tend to be heavy on protein, light on carbs, with red pepper flakes coloring mounds of crumbled pork sausage and a generous portion of shrimp. Order yours extra spicy, and/or kick up its potency with condiments already on the table. Wrap up a little ball in lettuce or cabbage for a juicy, leafy bite, and for a brief moment you'll almost think this isn't just a vehicle for a spicy cholesterol spike. 333 University Ave. W., St. Paul

DONG YANG

Kimchi Stew

This gem's buried in more ways than one. First, Dong Yang exists in the weird little "town" of Hilltop (surrounded entirely by Columbia Heights). And then, it's tucked away at the back of a Korean grocery store. Though about half the dishes feature the word "spicy" in either title or descrip-

tion, none could be more fascinating than this take on traditional jjigae stew. Here lies a perfectly balanced heat: Every bite shocks the senses, though none makes your hand hesitate before another thrust of the spoon. Tofu, disc-shaped rice cake, and pork belly float in a fiery orange broth, its flavor somehow even danker and zestier than cold kimchi – which, by the way, comes as part of their banchan. Koreans credit the fermented cabbage staple with their world-renowned longevity. That's nice, though honestly we'd tell you to slurp this stew even if we'd heard it could kill you. 725 45th Ave. NE, Hilltop

GANDHI MAHAL

Vegetable Vindaloo

The Portuguese who settled along India's western coast wanted to recreate a favorite dish from back home, with a little local twist: a handful of chilis. (When in Goa, do as the Goans do.) Other items on this list come with a warning. Gandhi Mahal has a dare: "Suggested extra hot." The little copper pot that soon arrives at your table is, somehow, as heavy as an anvil. Its contents emerge dark brown and mushy—at last, a dish everyone will be more tempted to smell than to photograph. Pile it on yellow basmati rice, or a wedge of squishy naan, though it's not so hot you can't eat it by itself. Feel the spice and fragrance rise right up your face; it comes on less like a threat than a familiar embrace, kind of like pulling on a wool hat. To be clear: The menu's correct. In this case, extra is just right. 3009 27th Ave. S., Minneapolis

Disclaimer: City Pages is not responsible for any involuntary reactions, including but not limited to sweating, crying, or profanity, that may be caused by consuming the above dishes. If, on the other hand, you find these offerings disappointingly mild: Congratulations, you're dead inside, please proceed to D-Spot. (See page 11). 



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Crying for Fun

HOW CRY BABY CRAIG'S HOT SAUCE TOOK OVER THE TWIN CITIES

CRY BABY CRAIG'S has exactly one negative Amazon review.

The critic, "Dave," notes that their neighborhood "once overflowed with a virtual cornucopia of interesting and delectable hot sauce flavors.

"With his fascist one hot sauce policy he single-handedly wiped out hot sauce diversity in the Twin Cities," he complains of Craig. "The only burning this hot sauce should be doing is in Hell."

A bit dramatic, but our guy has a point: In the Twin Cities, Cry Baby Craig's is everywhere.

There it is, waiting to be drizzled on your brunch at Bull's Horn or add a pop of pickled spice to your Parlour burger. It's in dishes themselves: At Sheridan Room, the habanero-garlic hot sauce appears

in their North by Northeast Nachos and in the Big Ass Cry Baby Fried Chicken Sandwich. Wrecktangle Pizza—North Loop Galley's Detroit-style newbie—makes whipped hot honey with it, and at Lowry Hill Meats, you'll find it on the infamous Saturday-morning-only breakfast sandwich.

In no way is this breaking news. "So, another article on Cry Baby Craig—as if he needs any publicity!" David Taylor of Hellraising Hot Sauce (not Amazon Dave, as far as we know) joked when contacted for comment on this story.

But the question remains: Why? What makes Craig's the heat standard? How did an accidentally discovered, weirdly made, electric-orange sauce come to dominate tabletops across the Twin Cities?

by
EMILY CASSEL

Ask creator Craig Kaiser, and you'll get a humble but absolutely unsatisfying reply: "It just kinda... you know. One restaurant at a time."

A CYNICAL PERSON might say Craig's is such a hit with Minnesotan palates because, to paraphrase more charitable online reviewers, it's "not that hot." Max Thompson at Nighthawks in south Minneapolis notes that it's "not too spicy"; Kate Lloyd at Rise Bagel Company in the North Loop likes that it's got "the right amount of heat."

"We use it because, besides being tasty, it's outside the flavor profile and heat level for most of the common hot sauces," Thompson adds. He likes how the sharp punch of garlic works with the fruity acidity. Nighthawks stocks a few big pepper purveyors—Sriracha, Tabasco, Cholula—but in Craig's, they've found a locally made option "with the same name recognition here in the Twin Cities."

Cry Baby Craig's tastes different from those other, more common hot sauces because it really is different. In 2012, Kaiser was working as a chef at Cafe Maude when he got a big batch of habaneros instead of jalapeños. Not one for waste, he pickled them, forgot about them for a few months, found them, blended them, put the results on pizza, and blew away Maude's staff. Et voila: The sauce that's now a Twin Cities ubiquity was born.

Eventually, Kaiser started bottling the stuff, calling it "Cry Baby Craig's" after his infant son. Tilia became his first restaurant client early on, when "it was just, like, emptied-out Tabasco bottles that had my name and telephone number on it." Now it's available in hundreds of restaurants and grocery stores. Kaiser and co-owner Sam Bonin moved—first to a production facility in Northeast, and then again to a bigger space in Faribault.

The accidental cold-pickled process made his hot sauce unlike any other in the country—so much so that he spent 18 months fighting with the FDA and Department of Agriculture to get it approved. "It really brings out the sweetness instead of being a spice bomb," says Jaren Turley, managing partner at Eat Street Social (where Kaiser worked while he got the brand up and running).

At Eat Street Social, it's the only hot sauce on offer, Minnesota-made or not. Turley says they don't need another. "It works for brunch, lunch, and dinner."

"It's like salt and pepper," says Thompson at Nighthawks. "It's like butter and maple syrup on the side for pancakes. It gives our guests choices to round out or customize their food to their palate."

The versatility, the flavor, the story—Cry Baby Craig's had it all, and word spread fast through the Twin Cities' culinary community. Kevin Kraus at Stray Dog says he first heard about it through a friend. Erik Sather at Lowry Hill Meats says the same.

Kaiser likens it to a domino effect: It's in Tilia, some sous chef from somewhere

else tries it and wants it, and things expand exponentially from there. Two restaurants turn to five, which turn to eight, which turn to 20. By chance, he wound up in a lot of canonically cool places—industry hangouts where a single bottle had a lot of reach.

But it wasn't just the knife-wielder's whisper network. The guy behind the hot sauce was hustling. Jordan Smith, founder and chef of Black Sheep Pizza, remembers falling in love with it when they were bottling it in a Northeast basement, back when Craig was making deliveries out of the back of his car.

"He was the guy running around in his own truck delivering everything for a long time," Sather says. "He's put the sweat equity in it, for sure."

Lloyd at Rise Bagel Co. explains it simply: "The man himself stopped in the shop one day. We heard the story. We tried the sauce. The rest is history."

MINNESOTA MIGHT not be Hot Sauce City, U.S.A., but there are a lot of locally made brands: Hellraising Hot Sauce, Lucky's, K-Mama, Isabel Street Heat, Nuclear Nectar, Double Take. And many of those offer several flavors. With the exception of the occasional limited-edition special sauce, Kaiser's only got one: the happenstance habanero that made him famous.

"Sometimes I'm envious of Craig—he has one sauce, and he can market the hell out of that one sauce," laughs David Taylor, who runs Hellraising Hot Sauce out of Richfield with his wife, Leigh.

So... why Craig's? Surely the other brands were hustling too?

Taylor has a theory, one echoed by hot sauce makers around town. "He's a chef, or he was. I think it's pretty obvious that opened a lot of doors for him. That's a culture in and of itself—a very tight culture—especially in a city of our size."

"Mr. Fuzz," who's behind Minneapolis-made small-batch hot sauce Nuclear Nectar, agrees: "Among other crucial tenets like timing, apt ambition, and luck, not to mention a truly excellent and unique product... Craig also has tons of chef friends here in the Twins who have been more than happy to blaze and pave table estate for 'the tears.'"

So it wasn't just Craig's pickling process that was different—it was his entire entrée into the market. He didn't go knocking on doors selling it wholesale; he didn't spend years building the brand up on the farmers market circuit. Being in restaurants acted as a passive demo—the bottles were on tables, marketing themselves.

Kaiser arrived at the right time, too. Taylor remembers trying to get his sauce in restaurants during the company's early days, and hearing, over and over: "Craig's been here." The guy left a trail of bright-orange bottles behind him like the Joker dropping playing cards at the scene of a crime.

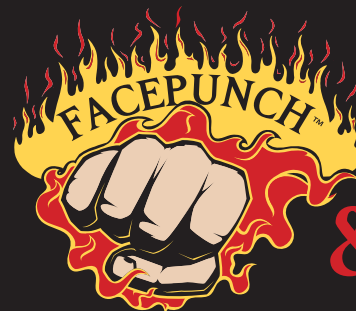
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Craig Kaiser

CAMERON CLARKSON

"It's really good advertising, at the end of the day," says Tony Stoy at Isabel Street Heat. "If you're able to get your product on a restaurant table, they've got constant customers coming in, and you've got a constant new supply of customers that are tasting your product on food."

It snowballs: If you notice that the other three restaurants on your corner have Craig's, Stoy speculates that maybe you'll want it too. (Certainly, looking at the neighborhood clusters of Cry Baby stars on Craig's location map, that seems at least a little true.) And once you're on tables, those bottles go fast—much faster than brands selling to individual people who might take months to polish one off at home.

"I've talked to people and said we've got a hot sauce company and they'll say, 'Oh, are you Craig?'" Taylor laughs. "He's so—you used the word 'ubiquitous.' He's got a large presence, and I think once the ball got rolling with that, it kind of took on a life of its own."

AT SMACK SHACK, Craig's has been such a hit that it unseated Tabasco as the third hot sauce stocked on tabletops. Executive chef Dave Buxton and GM Colin Stumbras say the heat and flavor make it an obvious choice for almost everything on their Cajun-leaning menu, whether that's spicing up shrimp dishes or adding a dash of unexpected heat to the clam chowder. They've used it in all kinds of sauces and specials over the years: A favorite is the habanero hollandaise on their brunch benedicts.

"And unfortunately for us—but fortunate for Craig—the bottles tend to go missing from our caddies quite a bit."

If Kaiser's success had only to do with Minnesota's spice tolerance, that wouldn't explain why Cry Baby Craig's has spread to all 50 states, available on restaurant tables and online from coast to coast. And if it's just about having chef

friends, well... that doesn't really explain it either. We're talking about people known for being comfortable telling you to your face that you suck, while staking their reputation on the flavor of the foods they put in front of guests. If Cry Baby Craig's wasn't excellent, they wouldn't serve it.

"He had the right network, but at the end of the day it's everybody's favorite," says Sather at Lowry Hill Meats. No one's kicking Tabasco off of tables to be nice.

Although there's at least a little bit of Minnesota Nice at play here. Because the thing you hear over and over when you ask folks about Craig is this: He rules.

"Craig's a really good dude, and he's for sure a local that's been in the food scene a long time," says Sather. Turley at Eat Street Social concurs. "His sauce is tasty and he's an all-around good guy. There is nothing he loves more than personally delivering his sauce to his restaurant partners."

"In our industry, sometimes it's as much about a relationship as it is about the product," the Smack Shack crew says. "We were excited to see him grow into the distribution that he has today, but he still comes by."

"Having met the man and the cry baby a couple times here at Nighthawks, we're happy to keep supporting a good guy and a great sauce," adds Thompson.

As for Kaiser? Well, he wouldn't take the credit. He owes his notoriety—and his cry baby's college fund—to an almost magical accident. It's like how songwriters talk about iconic lyrics flowing out of them, as if thanks to an external power, as if they needed to exist. Cry Baby Craig's is a culinary "Yesterday." Or... our Flubber.

"It became what it became on its own. I definitely worked hard, but at the end of the day it's what's in the bottle that really matters."

"If you try, you just get in your way," Kaiser adds. "Either it's there, or it's not." ☐



One flew over the seppuku-ku's nest

WHY ENDURE D-SPOT'S ABSURDLYHOT CHICKEN WINGS?

I'M STANDING AT D-SPOT'S counter for the second time in a week, in pursuit of the Seppuku wings—one of two varieties not listed on the Oakdale establishment's epic menu.

"Do you have a death wish?" asks a young employee.

"Yes."

Hearing my answer, his shoulders shrugged in a way that left no doubt we both knew whose funeral this was. When I asked if I might get a pair of gloves to go with my order of chicken wings, he shook his head. "You'll just have to die like a man," he sighed. I ordered a Hamm's from the tap, my preferred last earthly drink in the absence of bourbon.

The Seppuku wings require 24 hours' advance notice, payment upfront, and may be ordered only after the eater has proven their tolerance by finishing all five of D-Spot's "Scorpion's Lair" wings. The first of these

prerequisites is practical; the wings must be prepped outside regular business hours, which keeps the kitchen from gassing out the restaurant or causing bodily harm to anyone near enough to suffer their wrath while preparing them. Considering that arrangement, you can understand the second prerequisite: cold feet are common with wings this hot.

I had felt it myself as the car nosed its way around the curve of I-94 and St. Paul disappeared from my rearview on our first visit to D-Spot for a showdown with the Scorpion's Lair. My nerves were on edge, and it wasn't just my lifelong fear of suburbs. As a lover of spicy wings, I'd had a number of D-Spot's more punishing flavors, from the El Loco to the feisty cajun Rougarou. But I had yet to visit the Scorpion's Lair, and the deeply intimidating Seppuku had always existed more as a theoretical option than something

by

JESSE A. SAWYER

Advertorial



Just what makes CBD products and brands "craft," anyhow?

In a surge of excitement — and competition — for the best CBD and hemp products, it is often too easy to be led astray by misleading and at times dishonest representations.

At the forefront of these phis is the pretension that some large, massively-funded brands are "craft" CBD. Though the question emerges with wrinkles, caveats and complications, Nothing But Hemp chatted with Minny Grown CBD's Zach Rohr to find out the true meaning of "craftcannabis."

Zach founded Minny Grown CBD to offer a truly local and hand-grown and cultivated hemp and CBD experience for Minnesotans, provided by Minnesotan farmers and processed at Minny Grown's facilities in Cannon Falls. Rohr compared the need for hand-grown, lovingly-raised cannabis to an easy analogy in the food industry.

While big box stores may be interested only in their profit margins when dealing with meatpacking plants across the country and the globe, an entire network of local farmers and ranchers has sprung up where people are conscious enough of how they consume and what they put in their bodies.

"We're really trying to produce something locally and give to people who are from here. I think there's a lot to be said for these phytocannabinoids that are produced in the Minnesota sun. It is the same thing with food," Zach said. "Eat what is in your area seasonally."

Rohr said while larger mega-grower hemp operations may excel at simply extracting CBD isolates or manufacturing hundreds of acres mechanically for uses in textiles, rope and other industrial applications, nothing quite compares to the personal touch when it comes to CBD wellness products.

Maybe that's why Minny Grown CBD is both a local favorite and an award-winner for its fullspectrum organic brand products.

"We're focused on creating these unique cannabinoid profiles through our full spectrum oil because it's not the CBD isolate, it's not these huge extractors with 2,000 pounds an hour," Zach said. "It is really maintaining the environment throughout the extraction process. It's no secret that the plant works best as one, there's a reason why the plant naturally produces these cannabinoids, and that's what we're trying to capture and put into our products."

While combines, CBD isolates and hundreds if not thousands of acres of industrial hemp may make for a mediocre, widely-distributed hemp product, no reasonable person would compare that to a craft product, Rohr said.

Take the example of beer: You likely have a favorite nationally or internationally distributed beer, often with a lower alcohol content and overall quality than one you might encounter at a small local brewery you might visit. The key difference for Zach Rohr? You'll never meet the brewer of that mega-brand.

He takes pride in the handful of acres and the handful of farmer partners Minny Grown CBD works with to create true craft hemp products. Because to him, less is more when it comes to wellness CBD.

"We know where each plant came from without a doubt," Zach said. "I can look at a bag and basically point to you on a map where that bag came from, who that came from, who the farmer was and how they got involved in hemp. That's what makes things craft."

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I was likely to ever put myself through. Apparently I am not alone in this attitude of self-preservation; multiple times staff members mentioned they'd never seen anyone order the Seppuku.

The best way to enjoy a night at D-Spot is with a group of friends who like to share. The best way to enjoy a night in the Scorpion's Lair is with a group of friends who like to share and who also lack a safe word. We gathered around the full spread. Revel with me now in the names: Brimstone, Devil's Paradise, Scorpion King, Black Venom, and the dread Witch Doctor. Describing any one of these using traditional notions of flavor profiles is futile, though the Brimstone is a particularly delicious barbecue sauce right up until it eats your sanity. While each certainly has flavor—the Devil's Paradise's afternoon of fruit and tea as held in Beelzebub's kitchen, for example—the defining characteristic of each is the effect of ample capsaicin on the body and mind.

In her seminal 1985 book *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes, "Pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it." As friends and I made our way through the wings, descriptive phrasing broke down into primitive monosyllabics, grunts, and emphasized exhale-inhales akin to the Lamaze technique deployed during childbirth. We sweated, we cried, we spasmed. At one point I found myself blowing on a particularly nasty Black Venom flat before biting into it, as if this would cool the Scovilles into something more merciful. After diving into the dry rub Witch Doctor, easily the most sadistic of the Lair's denizens, we were overtaken by violent shivering that lasted several minutes and culminated in us donning our winter coats indoors. I remain unsure if we had developed wing-induced fevers or suffered from physical shock.

That is the thing with pain: While we bonded by sharing in the experience as a group, the reality of suffering is that it is experienced individually. We all burn alone. As the capsaicin shot frantic warnings to my brain—that peculiar mix of stimulation, warmth, pain, and pleasure—the brain responded by opening endorphin floodgates, an analgesic response trying in vain to keep up with my stubborn masochism. I felt my head and face carpet over with a not-unpleasant tingling before a couple minutes of near-total disassociation; my head floated up over the table to a vantage point from which to revel in the grand stupidity of it all.

Before leaving, we placed the order and paid for my Seppuku, to be "enjoyed" three nights hence. I went home to sleep and tried my level best not to think of what terrors I'd brought on myself. Did my guts understand that tonight's onslaught was merely the warm-up act? As if in answer, a fart presented itself, reeking of cremation.

Seppuku, also known as Harikari, was a ritual suicide practiced in the feudal era

by samurai, by a small number of Japanese officers during World War II, and, notably, by brilliant author (and mad nationalist) Yukio Mishima, whose 1970 seppuku was a botched and morbid affair, committed after a similarly botched and morbid attempt to lead a military coup on behalf of the emperor (the soldiers were not interested).

In seppuku, the soon-to-be-deceased plunges a short blade into their belly, slicing left to right. This can lead to death by blood loss, but more typically the pain is overwhelming, at which point the individual signals their second, who is tasked with decapitating them. A perfect decapitation is done in one stroke, and leaves the head still attached by a small bit of skin and tissue. It is considered an honorable death.

When I tell the counter staff at D-Spot that I have arrived for my Seppuku, they react much the way folks reacted to old Mishima's politics, best summarized as "Well that's insane but go off, I guess." There is no pomp, nor circumstance. We do not get a special T-shirt or a table. And, to be honest, I love it. Humans die in dirt and decay; why should an ability and willingness to tolerate intolerable spice mark any one of us as different? I find a seat in the back room, surrounded by my closest friends. A server comes by, carrying my basket of pain at arm's length from her face. "Who gets the death wings?"

In front of me, she places four to six wings. It's hard to tell, exactly. The wings are sunk in a tar-like viscosity from which no light will ever escape. Over that surface, orange and red pepper powders and seeds coat the bulging meat.

It is time to plunge the blade.

The best (worst) heats build. This one is no different. The bites heavy on dry powder attack the mouth and back of the throat, reducing my voice to a wheeze. But the real pain takes its time. My ear canals, face, neck, hands, arms, and back of my neck feel like low-level electric shock. I gasp like a fish pulled onto the deck of a boat. My body temperature rises and then drops. As with the earlier, less-hot wings, I feel my head detach and float upward toward the ceiling, stopped short by the skin still keeping it (just barely) attached. An honorable death.

Of course, I don't really die. I eat two wings and a bite of a third before throwing in the towel. I take greedy gulps from the bottle of milk a friend smuggled in and wait for the burn to fade into a pure endorphin after-party. Driving home, my insides are already beginning to turn on me. It's a reminder that tomorrow will, in fact, arrive, bringing with it the aftermath of this ritual, as well as a return to the jobs that grind us up daily and whatever horrors our big, dumb Anthropocene has in store for us. And although I did not achieve my beautiful death, I have affirmed this one thing to myself: I have the capacity to endure.



SARAH BRUMBLE

Harry Singh's long, slow burn

THE GODFATHER OF SPICE AND HIS FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

HARRY SINGH has spent the better part of four decades setting Minnesota mouths ablaze. As the one-man proprietor of the Original Caribbean Restaurant that bears his name, he's become the closest thing we have to a spice lord, simply by sticking to his pepper-guns.

"I started off in '83 with spicy food," says Singh, who's now 74. His first customers must have thought something was wrong, or that they were being punished.

"In those early years when I offered jerk people would say: 'Oh, you trying to kill us!'" Singh is seated in a booth after serving a busy lunch, where today jerk is the most popular dish by a landslide. "Times changed, the taste buds maybe. It started to develop in a way that everybody wants to be inquisitive... like, 'How hot is that?'"

It can't be overstated how little Harry Singh's Original Caribbean Restaurant has changed in 35 years, from food to ambiance. After her first visit to the establishment, the Star Tribune's Karin Winegar wrote of Singh's, "Seashells, plastic flowers, oilcloth-covered table tops... all that's needed are lazy flies, a cat or a dog dozing under a pot of flowers under a porch and curried

goat on the menu to duplicate many little cafes in the islands from the Bahamas to the Antilles." Her piece is dated 1985, but she could have written that yesterday.

Singh started out on Central Avenue in northeast Minneapolis before bopping to 32nd and Cedar in South, then briefly holding court in the heart of Uptown, only to land at his current spot on Nicollet 18 years ago. The original aesthetic

remains intact, from a cloud-painted drop ceiling and a brilliant, dangling wood macaw, to the giant hand-lettered sign above the kitchen window that Singh commissioned decades ago, which has outlasted many a lease. It reads as long as this article, but concludes, simply, "Tell a friend."

"I never give up, I just continue. They follow you," Singh says, with the sort of patience one imagines he honed early, possibly while cooking for seven younger siblings in a kitchen he calls "semi-primitive."

But how Singh has managed to distill the heat of the sun itself into regrettably wide-mouth bottles for all these years remains a mystery. "I have a unique pattern, a method of how to procure and produce this thing." It turns out his secret is a longstanding, committed relationship with FedEx.

by
SARAH BRUMBLE

"Before the Trinidad Scorpion became popular, I used to be using that from day one," he begins. The once rare, unheard-of pepper that's since become a hot-head favorite allowed him to give business back to his home, capitalize on Trinidad's year-round growing season, and sidestep Minnesota's less hot, more inconsistent local pepper selection. "So I have this cultivated land—anywhere you can do that, but ours, right?—I have the guys as we speak... send a fresh [batch] every two to three weeks," he explains, thumping his wedding ring on the table for emphasis. "I make [two or three cases] every two to three days."

Only later will Singh reveal that at some point he'd begun bottling a second, even hotter sauce after regulars pleaded with him. The variations between the two are unmarked. "Look for the darker ones," he says. "It just goes [*snaps fingers*] like that."

Singh bottles and sells his signature hot sauces for \$10-\$15—a price that depends, he says, on whether 1) you're a regular, 2) you're buying in bulk, and 3) he thinks you're going to slap a new label over his in the futile hope of reselling it. The sauce is everything when it comes to understanding the unmistakable flavor of his food, its signature burn, and the restaurant's inspiring longevity. One bottle costs as much as three orders of his covetable, fiery, occasionally available Doubles.

For Singh, this is an ingredient, not a topping. It happens to come in a bottle. "Don't put the raw-raw thing. That is what people makes a lot of mistakes."

As a generation of diners who grew up believing "Harry Singh" to be synonymous with "spice" enter kitchens of their own, the man himself plays it pretty cool about his influence. He stopped collecting clippings for his wall or the State Fair stand long ago. "I know what I do behind that stove with the pepper, with this, with that, whatever," he says, then immediately adds: "You always find that with this business, people try to impose on you, number one, and imitate you, number three. But they fail to realize this is the original, this is the creator."

He might not need clippings anymore, but Harry Singh knows that as tastes change, he might soon feel the heat from his rivals. For now, the Godfather of Spice just isn't impressed with what's out there. Find him keeping his head down and doing the work, as always. **EF**

Harry Singh's Original Caribbean Restaurant is open six days a week for lunch and dinner, closed in between and also at random other times like when a trip to the market calls, and during that spell after the State Fair when he recovers in the islands from the hum of voices. Look for Singh taking orders, cooking your food, and refilling your water with a gleam in his eye until a condo properly threatens his lease—which, for now, it hasn't.

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BY ALI ELABBADY

The Twin Cities isn't short on fantastic Mexican cuisine. Thanks to fine establishments like El Burrito Mercado, Hamburguesas El Gordo, La Tapatia, and more, finding a good taco, alambre, or delicious pozole is easy. However, a renaissance has arrived, and it has just one name: birria.

Birria was originally served for celebrations and holidays. But now the dish has become increasingly abundant in California, where Teddy's Red Tacos has been catching press aplenty not only for the birria it cooks up, but also for its commercial spot during 2019's Super Bowl LIII.

Birria is a concentrated and spicy stew made with meat using a variety of chiles and spices. Hailing from Guadalajara in Mexico's Jalisco region, birria was once traditionally made with goat (birria de chivo) or sheep/mutton (birria de borrego), but its preparations have expanded to include Tijuana-style beef (birria de res) and chicken (birria de pollo). Birria usually comes with a consommé in a cup, lavishly garnished with fresh onions and cilantro, which can be either sprinkled atop tacos with a spoon, or used for dipping, like a French dip's au jus.

Though birrierias are springing up in California and other places, finding birria in the Twin Cities is a bit of an adventure. Spots like El Burrito Mercado and Cocina San Marcos in Mercado Central experiment with birria as a special, or something they might serve on the weekends, and Fried Cheese Chicken and Beef Birria tacos graced Animales Barbecue's menu as specials this past summer. But as Gang Starr would say, the question remains: Where can you find birria in the Twin Cities? Here are three spots where you can get your regular birria fix.

A.B.E. = All Birria Everything

The first stop on the birria train is Taqueria y Birrieria Las Cuatro Milpas. Sitting at the intersection of East Lake Street and Bloomington Avenue, adjacent to Mercado Central, it's a relative newcomer to Midtown Minneapolis. Known for a "Make Tacos Not Walls" adage adorning the inside and awning of its space, Las Cuatro Milpas serves birria in countless variations and styles. They offer birria de res, birria de borrego, and birria de chivo all in tacos (dorado or traditional), burritos, soup, and quesadillas.

For the sake of research, I went for five traditional tacos: two beef, two lamb, and one goat taco. The tacos arrive on a plate,



with plenty of chopped radish, caramelized onions, and some cucumber slices, as well as being topped with the usual accoutrements of fresh onions and cilantro.

There are three salsa choices—avocado, salsa verde, and a super spicy salsa roja—to go with a daily-made consommé from the birria de res. Its flavor is deeper than spicy; the salsas allow you to customize the spice level. Plus, the cilantro and onions that garnish the consommé manage to keep things flavorful for your tacos, whether you're more of a dipper or a spoon sprinkler.

While the birria de res tastes more like a traditional barbacoa or ropa vieja, the birria de chivo and birria de borrego can be a little gamier and chewy, though still savory. Everything tastes even better when dipped into the consommé.

The best part about Las Cuatro Milpas's birria is its variety—there are no wrong options or approaches, but remember the consommé is vital.

O.B.: Original Birria

Across the street from Las Cuatro Milpas and next door to the Mercado Central, Taco



ALI ELABBADY

Taxi is best known for slinging late-night tacos and burritos, though they've long offered birria de chivo and consommé as a permanent menu item, too. Taco Taxi's Jalisco-style birria de chivo can be served up in any style from the menu.

The brothers who run Taco Taxi aim to keep things deliciously simple. The consommé de chivo served alongside the birria de chivo tacos comes in the equivalent of a 16-ounce coffee cup, with a heaping pile of cilantro and onions stirred right into the consommé.

The consommé served with Taco Taxi's Birria de Chivo is spicier than other taquerias' in town thanks to a heaping amount of chiles cooked into the broth; the onions and cilantro provide a zest that makes the hot sauce served with the tacos an afterthought. The birria de chivo at Taco Taxi is chopped finely, peppered with the occasional huge chunk of chivo. It's savory and delicious in taco form, and thanks to the spice that the consommé carries, it helps make for a more flavorful and vibrant chivo, no matter how you choose to enjoy your birria.

Messed with the Best, Where Is de Res?

In St. Paul, at University and Victoria, Homi Restaurant has been open for business for almost 10 years, operating as one of the Twin Cities's few jack-of-all-trades Mexican spots. It's no surprise then that they've had birria de res on the menu since day one.

Unlike Las Cuatro Milpas and Taco Taxi, Homi serves its birria de res soaked in an even balance of chiles and spices; however, the meat is done up more like a barbacoa or ropa vieja, with consistency similar to pulled pork soaked in broth. While the birria de res at Homi is not served with consommé, you get a decent amount of concentrated stock from the meat, including bay leaves used in making the birria. The birria de res at Homi is flavorful, juicy, and robust, but still moderate on spice.

In addition, Homi's birria is served with tortillas, rice, and beans on the side, so you can eat this birria with a fork. Otherwise, form your own makeshift tacos from those provided tortillas, beans, and rice, plus some of Homi's fantastic salsa verde that comes with their chips. The birria de res at Homi allows you to make the experience itself as deliciously vibrant as you choose. Homi's menu also has a lamb consommé with barbacoa, which comes with vegetables—and no sides, since it's labeled under the menu's Caldos (soup) section.

Birria is a wondrous and fantastic delicacy in Mexican cuisine. Thankfully, we have options as to where to acquire it, so make the most of your experience. If gamey meats such as chivo and borrego aren't your style, you can always go with chicken or beef—but whatever you do, don't forget about the consommé! Consommé makes the experience all worth it, and makes for an excellent dip, no matter which way you have your birria, so adventure wisely.

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19

A LIST

SATURDAY Beer-fueled Leap Day parties at local taprooms **p. 19**

SUNDAY Louise Erdrich celebrates the release of her new novel **p. 21**

Tom Servo, Crow T. Robot, and Joel return to shit-talk bad movies.



IMAGE COURTESY OF HENNEPIN THEATRE TRUST

THURSDAY 2.27

BOOKS/TALKS

SISTER HELEN PREJEAN

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

Sister Helen Prejean is perhaps the most famous nun of modern times. Her 1993 New York Times bestselling book, *Dead Man Walking*, chronicled her encounters with death row inmates and the spiritual counseling she provided them. It was made into a movie starring Sean Penn and Susan Sarandon, whose portrayal of Prejean won her an Academy Award for Best Actress in 1996. In *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions*, Prejean recounted accompanying two men convicted of murder—on dubious evidence—to execution. Her recent memoir, *River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey*, follows her path from pledging her life to the Catholic Church at age 18, to a romantic entanglement with

an alcoholic priest, to becoming one of the most outspoken social justice advocates and death penalty opponents in the Christian community today. Sister Helen brings her stories and wisdom to St. Kate's on Thursday as part of the University's "Life and Death" learning series. Find the event in the Rauenhurst Ballroom, Coeur de Catherine. 7 p.m. Free. 2004 Randolph Ave., 651-690-6000. —ERICA RIVERA

COMEDY

ZAINAB JOHNSON

RICK BRONSON'S HOUSE OF COMEDY

"I had a shaved head for seven years," Zainab Johnson tells an audience. These days, she's bald no more. "My friend said, 'I didn't know your hair grew like that.' Like what? I was trying to lead her into a racism trap." The friend pointed out that Johnson's hair had grown back in coarse and tight. "That's a misconception," she explains. "My hair grows straight, but then I walk out into the world

and oppression makes it grow tight and coarse." Johnson also talks about her family onstage, as being one of 13 provides a lot of material. "People are like, 'Your parents had a lot of sex.' Yeah, at least 13 times," she says. "Also, there's 13 of us. So someone has to be gay. At least, statistically. But we have no idea who it is. We are patiently waiting outside the closet wondering, 'Who is it?'" 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 9:45 p.m. Friday; 7 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday. \$16. 408 E. Broadway, Mall of America, Bloomington; 952-858-8558. **Through Saturday** —P.F. WILSON

FRIDAY 2.28

FILM

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000

PANTAGES THEATRE

Mystery Science Theater 3000 is middle-aged, but it's still as fresh as ever and touring the U.S. with another live show.

Joining the cast on this go round is Minnesota native Yvonne Freese, who plays both Gypsy (now known as GPC) and Mega Synthia, a new character. "I did a show a few years back called *Spandex: The Musical*, and half the cast was from New York City." Cue the *MST3K* gang: "New York City!?" Freese became close friends with many of her castmates, and this past summer one of them sent her the audition notice for *MST3K*. "I clicked on it and thought, 'Dream job.' My friends convinced me to go, and I got the job on my first New York City audition—an incredible stroke of luck!" Freese was familiar with the show but not a superfan. She quickly became acclimated to the *MST3K* universe, though. As GPC, she gets a few riffs in and has written several for the show. She even gets a little practice in while traveling. "We watch movies on the bus," she says, "and once you're in the rhythm of it you just start [riffing] all the time until someone says, 'Stop!'"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19 ►



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IN THE LOOP

A-LIST

CONTINUED FROM FRIDAY ►

You're ruining the movie!" 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday. \$39.50-\$299.50. 710 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis; 612-339-7007. **Also Saturday —P.F. WILSON**

ART/MUSEUM

EXTRA/ORDINARY: FIRST LOOK

AMERICAN SWEDISH INSTITUTE

The American Swedish Institute celebrates its 90th birthday with "extra/ordinary: The American Swedish Institute. At Play." The exhibition highlights a selection of 29 objects from its permanent collection, many on view for the first time ever, and shares the stories behind each item. Among them is a 20-foot Dala horse. The children's toy, traditionally carved out of wood and painted bright colors, comes from the Swedish province of Dalarna, and is often used as a symbol of Swedish culture. ASI will also be opening select rooms of the Turnblad mansion for the first time in 10 years, using the space to bring a new picture book, *A to Zääö: Playing with History at the American Swedish Institute*, to life. The book features Nate Christopherson's pen and ink drawings, and watercolor images by Tara Sweeney. At the museum, different rooms pair these works with historical artifacts such as carvings, photographs, textiles, and musical instruments. At the preview party this Friday, February 28, from 7 to 10 p.m., there will be hands-on activities, games, and live music, plus refreshments and cocktails available for purchase from FIKA. Tickets are \$15 to \$20 for opening night festivities. 2600 Park Ave., Minneapolis; 612-871-4907. **Through July 5 —SHEILA REGAN**

THEATER

THE MUSIC MAN

CHANHASSEN DINNER THEATRES

The Music Man, a five-time Tony Award winner by Meredith Willson, centers on a swindler, "Professor" Harold Hill, who convinces the naive citizens of a small Midwestern town that the key to ensuring moral rectitude in their children is a proper musical education. While Hill's conniving does manage to beguile the majority of the town, one skeptical librarian, Marian Paroo, sees through the ruse and sets out to expose the con man. Such a setup could certainly serve as an allegory for political chicanery, but rest assured that the prevailing mood is far from dour. The production has teamed musical director Andy Dust with choreographer Tamara Kangas Erickson to create rousing spectacles of such revered standards as "Seventy-Six



ASI showcases iconic items and new illustrations.

IMAGE COURTESY OF ASI

Trombones," "Ya Got Trouble," and "Til There Was You." With headliners Michael Gruber and Anne Michels under the accomplished direction of Michael Brindisi, *The Music Man* looks to charm even the most cynical audiences with genuine romance. 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays; 6:30 p.m. Sundays; 1 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays. \$50-\$95. 501 W. 78th St., Chanhassen; 952-934-1525. **Through September 5 —BRAD RICHASON**

SATURDAY 2.29

BARHOPPING

FIRE & ICE

BAUHAUS BREW LABS

In celebration of Leap Day this Saturday, pretty much every brewery is up to something fun. Bauhaus Brew Labs is one of the places you may want to hit up if you're looking for a beer-fueled hang. The party will take place both inside and out, with live music indoors and hot/cold fun to be had outside. Revival and Minnesota BBQ Co. will be serving up meaty eats, while over by the fire pit folks can enjoy s'mores,

hot cider, and hot-poked pours of the Bleatboxer Bock. For those looking for more than the meat sweats, Stokeyard Outfitters will be stopping by with their mobile sauna. Tunes inside include sets from alt-bluegrass group Luke Warm and the Cool Hands, plus funk from Wax Audio DJ. Noon to 11 p.m. Free. 1315 Tyler St. NE, Minneapolis; 612-276-6911. **—JESSICA ARMBRUSTER**

THEATER

THE BACCHAE

GUTHRIE THEATER

It's understandable if ancient Greek tragedies are viewed by modern audiences through a lens of academic appreciation rather than from a more emotionally engaged perspective. That is unlikely, however, with the much anticipated SITI Company production of Euripides' *The Bacchae*. Not only does the poetic translation by Aaron Poochigian embrace the emotional sweep of the material, but the core themes are rendered with an originality that highlights a topical resonance. The narrative follows the dire consequences that arise when Pentheus, a mortal king,

attempts to subdue the free-spirited will of Dionysus, god of such things as wine, theater, fertility, and ecstasy. SITI has made the inspired choice to focus on how the imposed social order is explicitly designed to keep women relegated to subservient roles. Upending that system, this dynamic production is particularly notable for the number of female performers who have been cast in parts historically conferred upon males, including SITI Company co-artistic director Ellen Lauren in the role of Dionysus. Under the direction of Anne Bogart, the retribution leveled against Pentheus is transformed into a cathartic smashing of paternalistic repression. 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays; 7 p.m. Sundays. \$25-\$79. 818 S. Second St., Minneapolis; 612-377-2224. **Through April 5 —BRAD RICHASON**

BARHOPPING

ROYAL CRUSH: THE QUEEN BOTTLE RELEASE

INDEED BREWING COMPANY

The Queen returns at Indeed this weekend. This whiskey barrel-aged imperial stout is a strong pint for the coldest and darkest days of winter. The Queen will make its taproom debut at Thursday's Flight Night, which will feature four variations. Then, on Saturday, Indeed will host a bottle release party and chess tournament. Chess is paced perfectly for sipping a strong stout; players will score a 10-ounce pour every time they make it through a round. In between strategy sessions, head to the firepit for s'mores and fill up on hot food from Sandy's Grill. There will also be fire poker for those who prefer their beers a little caramelized. Indeed will also rotate limited cellar selections on tap every two hours. That menu includes 2018's Rum King, with added espresso and vanilla bean; 2019's Whiskey Queen, aged in a bourbon barrel with Mexican honey; imperial red ale Chase the Devil; Old Breed, a brew made from barley wine; and 2015's Whiskey Queen. A photobooth, pop-up vinyl shop, and DJ tunes round out the event. Noon to 8 p.m. Free. 711 15th Ave. NE, Minneapolis; 612-843-5090. **—LOREN GREEN**

BARHOPPING

LEAP DAY LUAU

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 21 ►

CITY PAGES

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readers' choice poll

PHASE 1

FEBRUARY 5-26

Type in your nominee for each category

PHASE 2

MARCH 4-25

Select from the top five nominees of each category

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FOLLOW US

Louise Erdrich celebrates her latest novel at Plymouth Congregational Church.



PAUL EMMEL

CONTINUED FROM SATURDAY ►

plenty of tropical elements, including special beers such as the Tropical Milkshake IPA and the Melt Peach-Plum Smoothie Sour, as well as other surprises throughout the day. Games will be tropical as well, with limbo and other fun planned. Minnesota BBQ Co. will host a hog roast, which will hopefully remind you of warmer days. The brewery is also selling a limited number of OMNI sunglasses and beach towels through an online, pre-party package that also reserves a take-home crowler to keep the party hot back home. Noon to 11 p.m. Free. 9462 Deerwood Ln. N., Maple Grove; 763-424-6664. —LOREN GREEN

BARHOPPING

7TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY

612BREW

One of northeast Minneapolis's oldest taprooms, 612, is celebrating seven years this weekend. The party kicks off at noon, with activities scheduled throughout the day. Tattoo artist Metal Mike will be on hand from 2 to 8 p.m. for those who want to commemorate the occasion. From 3 to 4 p.m. the action really picks up, as 612 will serve patrons with a free beer that hour. Music for the night includes sets from the Hawthorn Collection, Heavy for the Hawk, and alt rockers the Violet Nine. Beer-wise, you'll find three new hazy IPAs, imperial stout Light Into Ashes, and a one-time gravity keg of a Grevolvinga Düsseldorf-style Altbier, which the crew

will be tapping at 5 p.m. Score a take-home crowler for \$7, and round out the night with half-price beer starting at 10 p.m. Noon to midnight. Free. 945 Broadway St. NE, Minneapolis; 612-930-4606. —LOREN GREEN

SUNDAY 3.1

BOOKS

LOUISE ERDRICH

PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Award-winning Minnesota author Louise Erdrich is back with a new novel, *The Night Watchman*. The story, set in the 1950s, is based on the life of her grandfather. When a new "emancipation" bill reaches the floor of the United States Congress, Native Americans in the Midwest begin to consider how this will impact their rights and way of life. Those characters include Thomas Wazhashk, a night watchman at a jewel bearing plant in rural North Dakota, and Pixie "Patrice" Paranteau, a smart, ambitious high-school grad who's heading to Minneapolis in search of her missing sister. Erdrich explores Native issues that are, sadly, still timely today, including cultural preservation, displacement, and broken promises from the U.S. government. The author will share her thoughts and read from her latest work at this publication celebration at Plymouth Congregational Church. 4 p.m. Free. 1900 Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis; 612-871-7400. —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER

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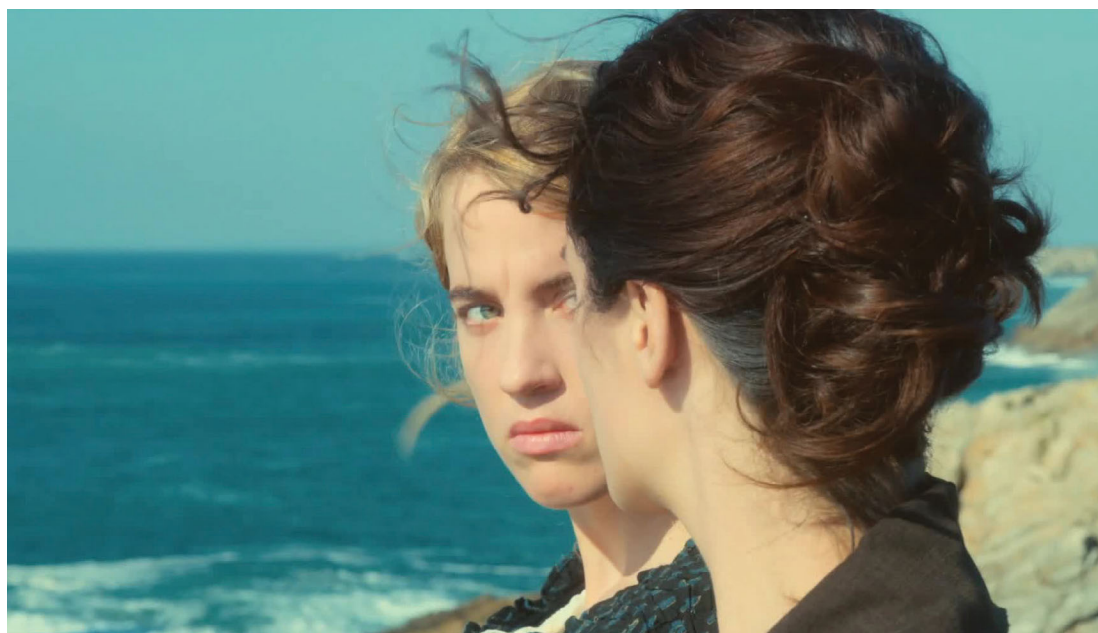
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FILM

THE LOOK OF LOVE

Portrait of a Lady on Fire is a masterpiece about the intimacy of being seen



LILIES FILM

BY KEITH HARRIS

There's no more astute anthropologist of how the lives of teen girls collide than Céline Sciamma.

Her adolescents circle each other, predatory and rapt, unsure if they want to kiss, befriend, humiliate, or become one other—not because they confuse desire and friendship and rivalry and identification, Sciamma seems to say, but because all those qualities are just elements of a single overwhelming core need to gain something undefinable yet essential from another.

For the first time, in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, Sciamma suggests that "something" is attainable, if not permanently. Here she extends her themes into young adulthood for what is, compared to her three previous features, a straightforward love story. Or as straightforward as a love story between two young French women in the late 18th century could be in the hands of a director who understands that desire becomes love only when you allow another to perpetually recreate you through her gaze, and you return the favor with your own. So, yeah, not straightforward then.

Marianne (Noémie Merlant) arrives on a craggy island that for much of the film

appears populated by just three women: a mother, a daughter, and their maid. She's there to paint the daughter, Héloïse (Adèle Haenel), so that a Milanese suitor can judge the goods before he marries her. As for Héloïse, she'd sooner choose to live in a convent, or perhaps hurl herself from a cliff like her sister before her, than submit to this marriage, and in protest she refuses to sit for a portrait. To accomplish her task, Marianne assumes the guise of a walking companion, accompanying Héloïse along the shoreline by day and painting her from recollected furtive glances at night. Soon Héloïse (understandably) interprets the depth and intensity of Marianne's dark gaze as love, and inevitably her concern about being seen by her possible husband gives way to a more nuanced fear of being misseen by someone she wants to adore her.

For all the eloquence of Sciamma's screenplay, which you could mistake for an adaptation of some classic novel you'll never forgive your Comp Lit prof for leaving off the syllabus, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* is a movie about two women looking at (and seeing) each other. For two hours, Merlant and Haenel (who appeared as a teen in Sciamma's 2007 feature *Water Lilies*, then too the object of another girl's desire)

PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE

directed by Céline Sciamma
area theaters, now playing

reshape each other's characters with a quiet intensity that demands constant attention.

Cinematographer Claire Mathon, who doused the Dakar of Mati Diop's remarkable 2019 class-conscious ghost story *Atlantics* in an organic neon that had the presence of an additional character, has a gift for shooting day and night as though they're different worlds. Both the island's sunlit watercolor pastels and the oil-on-canvas flicker-lit darkness of candles, fireplaces, and bonfires are suffused with romance and danger.

But Sciamma didn't dip into the past to wring pathos from queer "forbidden love"; she doesn't underplay the cruelty that limits the lives of these women (there's an unexpectedly tender if no less wrenching abortion scene), but the historical setting allows her to explore how pleasure is always shaped within constraints. The film closes with a showcase of emotional ambiguity that you could interpret a dozen ways, all of which would feel accurate and all incomplete, and it's with this final shot that a brilliant movie becomes a masterpiece. **A**

STAR TOURS

Bell's planetarium does heavy lifting for *Silent Sky*

JAY GABLER

Staging *Silent Sky* in a planetarium was an inspired idea by Theatre Pro Rata, whose unique production marks a welcome new use for the Bell Museum's stylish Whitney and Elizabeth MacMillan Planetarium. As it happens, though, the company's otherwise unexceptional take on Lauren Gunderson's 2011 play sorely needs the added attraction.

The play tells the true story of astronomer Henrietta Swan Leavitt, whose work at Harvard in the early 20th century became part of the foundation for the discovery that the universe is, literally, expanding. Gunderson captures a moment when opportunities for women were also expanding, but were still couched in a repressive patriarchal system. For Leavitt, that meant she wasn't even allowed to use the telescope at her own job: She was hired as a human "computer," documenting the brightness of stars captured on photographic plates.

As Leavitt, Victoria Pyan greets every obstacle with a cheerful determination. She's a bright new star in the department she shares with her colleagues Annie Cannon (Amber Bjork) and Williamina Fleming (Sarah Broude, glorying in a robust Scottish accent). Leavitt's presence unsettles Peter Shaw (Carl Swanson), a colleague who's astonished by Henrietta's ambition and smitten with her smile. Complications ensue.

Although Gunderson is, with good reason, one of America's most popular playwrights, her script for *Silent Sky* doesn't have a lot of built-in hooks. The plot is driven by a familiar tension between small-town roots and big-city dreams, with a number of pivotal developments happening offstage. That gives the five-person cast a lot of exposition to handle in a play that also requires them to explain concepts like spectral classification and period-luminosity scales.

In the play, the cosmos is deployed metaphorically as well as being discussed in its own terms and contrasted with the Christian views of heaven held by Leavitt's



CHARLES GORRILL

SILENT SKY

Bell Museum
2088 Larpen Avenue W., St. Paul
612-626-9660; through March 8

sister Margaret (Danielle Krivinchuk). It's perfectly apt, then, to stage *Silent Sky* in a space where audience members can lean back and contemplate the night sky along with the characters. The illuminated dome also helps to set the scenes on Earth, with immersive landscape imagery transporting viewers from verdant countryside to imposing observatory.

That does, of course, tend to pull the attention up and away from the actors, challenging the cast to make strong impressions. Under the direction of Carin Bratlie Wethern, these performers are pleasant but not particularly memorable. Most critically, they miss or underplay a lot of the humorous beats in a play that requires creative characterization and careful timing. Bjork and Broude keep their scenes crisp, but the lack of chemistry between Pyan and a charmless Swanson utterly deflates a love story that's one of the script's weak links to start with.

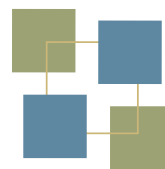
Fundamentally, though, the show succeeds at not just telling the story of a pioneering scientist but unlocking the fascination of the stars. Just as Leavitt herself did, *Silent Sky* leaves you with a lot to think about. **C**

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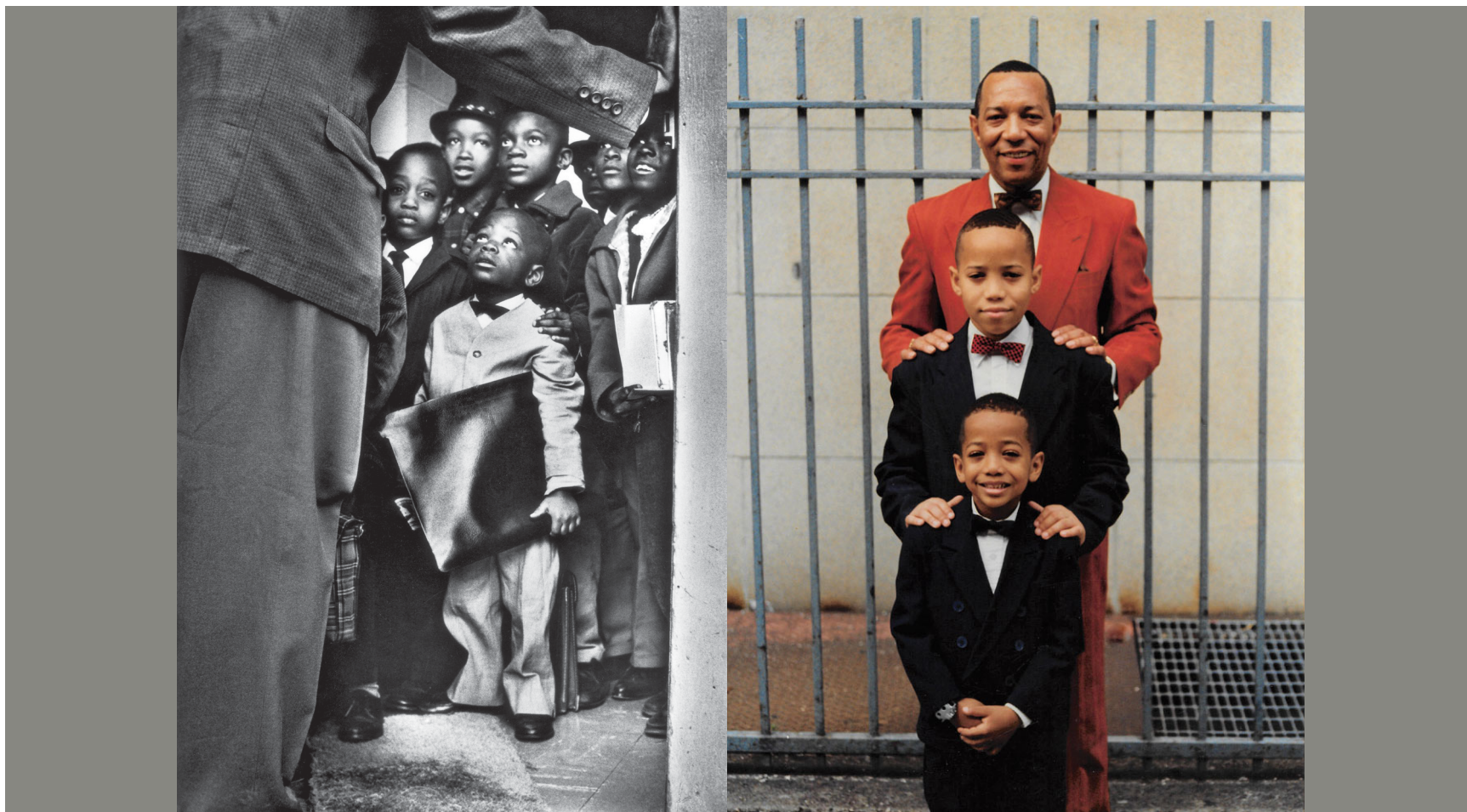


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as a source of guidance and inspiration, and their combined bodies of work document expressions of dignity, honor, hope, and love in the African American community. *A Choice of Weapons, Honor and Dignity* is curated by Robin Hickman-Winfield, CEO and Executive Producer of SoulTouch Productions and a great-niece of Gordon Parks, in collaboration with students at Gordon Parks High School.



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(L to R): Gordon Parks, *Black Muslim Schoolchildren, Chicago, Illinois, 1963*. Gelatin silver print. Collection Minnesota Museum of American Art. Image courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation. Jamel Shabazz, *Father and Sons, Harlem, c. 1990*. Archival pigment print. Courtesy of the artist.



THE RESTAURANT PROJECT

DINNER MUSIC

Local restaurants are getting choosier about the music they play—and even bringing in experts to help

BY SOPHIE VILENSKY

Six months ago, someone named Kyle decided to go online and write a three-star review of Boludo.

He wasn't dissatisfied with the empanadas or the pizza that make up the bulk of the restaurant's menu. Instead, Kyle had one request: "Just turn down the music a bit."

Sorry, Kyle. Not gonna happen.

"Without music, Boludo would be completely different," says Facundo Defraia, the restaurant's chef and owner. "I understand these reviewers want to be in a calm place, but my idea of bringing Boludo to Minneapolis is about bringing a culture."

Born and raised in Argentina, Defraia originally came to the United States to play music. He'd grown up hearing his grandmother sing along to tango on the kitchen radio "in this beautiful voice she had." But the cooking he helped with on all those afternoons influenced him too. Working as a chef, Defraia didn't have a lot of time to perform, so when Boludo

opened in 2018, he wanted music to be integral to the restaurant experience.

"To me, cooking and music go hand and hand," Defraia says. "When I'm in Boludo I'm singing, I'm playing guitar. People think I'm crazy, but it's how I express myself. This is what you're going to find in Argentina all over the place."

Boludo's playlist, which can be found on Defraia's own Spotify account under the name "BOLUDO," currently includes Bad Bunny, Gustavo Cerati, Carlos Gardel, J Balvin, and SUMO.

"It's the music I grew up with. You can listen to some tango, some rock, some reggae. It's the music that influenced me to be in this industry and influenced me in my life."

Defraia is just one of the many restaurateurs who've taken DJ duties into their own hands. Why run the place, after all, if you can't control the aux? At Grand Cafe, chef and owner Jamie Malone curates the playlist. At Spoon and Stable the responsibility was recently placed in the hands of some cool hosts. Other spots, like St.

Paul Bagelry and Five Watt Coffee, are known for their music as much as their sips and bites: The former's menu items are named after famous artists; the latter has its own radio station.

Chef Isaac Becker doesn't let anyone near his restaurants' sound systems. "It's a pretty personal thing to me. It was always something I looked forward to before opening my own place—being able to choose the music," Becker says.

The chef and co-owner of 112 Eatery, Burch Steak, Snack Bar, and Bar La Grassa, Becker has created two playlists: one for evening dining, one for brunch at Burch. But though all his restaurants use the same nighttime playlist, it's unlikely each location will sound the same—the selection currently has around 2,000 songs.

A list of artists recently added to the playlist includes Gesaffelstein, ZZ Top, Lil Keed, Robert Fripp, Peggy Gou, Mr. Oizo, Los Tigres del Norte, Kim Gordon, Amanda Lepore, and some Michael Gira solo stuff. All bets are off when it comes to genre, but Becker typically tries to keep songs under six or seven minutes. "If I put on songs that are 12 or 15 minutes long, more than anything I think it drives the employees crazy," he says.

Though Kyle has yet to weigh in, the chef's musical tastes are definitely not free from guest criticism. "Some people don't like—really don't like—heavy metal," Becker says. But there's been positive recognition as well. Guests often ask about songs that are playing, eager to write down names of unfamiliar artists. And once, TV on the Radio heard something they appreciated while dining and offered up free concert tickets.

"I think music can create energy in the room. I like a lot of obscure stuff, so it's fun when a customer recognizes it and comments on it," Becker says. "I don't pick and choose places I go based on what music they play, but I can tell if it's someone's personal choice."

Young Joni is one of the restaurants Becker cites as offering particularly good music, and that's no surprise: They brought in professionals. Their playlist was specially designed by Uncanned Music—a company dedicated to the curation, design, and implementation of music and music systems in restaurants.

Co-owned by Scott McNiece and David Allen, Uncanned started as a business for custom playlists. McNiece had been doing the work for years, first as a food

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MUSIC

runner with good taste and the go-ahead to put some songs together, and soon after as a full-time music curator for Hogsalt Hospitality. As other restaurants began to take note, he partnered with Allen, an audio engineer.

"You're basically giving someone a flavor they didn't ask for," McNiece says of creating a soundtrack for a restaurant. "Music affects how everything tastes, feels, looks. It's the one thing that people are consuming in a restaurant that they didn't actually order."

McNiece has read all the studies about what music fits each particular season, or how the right music can create specific emotional effects, but he says in the end none of that matters.

"You're the one having a dinner party here. And everyone is the guest. Some restaurateurs want to detach. They'll ask, 'What does the target market want?'" says McNiece. "I want to work with people who have something artistic to say."

So the process starts with a chat, to understand the proprietor's personality. When it came to Young Joni, conversation turned to the restaurant's name—a tribute to the mothers of co-owners Ann Kim and Conrad Leifur.

"There was a familial, intergenerational vibe. I was playing Ann this Korean song from the '60s, and she said it reminded her of something her mother would play," McNiece says. "We essentially built the first playlist to be what Ann Kim's mother's eight-track might be playing—if she continued to collect eight-tracks until today." It was called "AK8Tracks." (AK for Ann Kim.)

After Kim mentioned to Uncanned that she wanted Prince on the playlist, McNiece added the Numero Group collection of Twin Cities '70s R&B *Purple Snow* to the mix. This playlist became "Northeast Soul."

In the back bar, Uncanned took the project further by fully installing a reel-to-reel system. "Part of that concept was wanting the space to feel like a cabin that Conrad's parents had," McNiece says. Today, the bar adds a new tape to its rotation every few months—about as often as the restaurant overhauls its digital playlist.

"Music is often people's first perception of a place. If you hear the food is good but walk through the door and hear a song you hate, the chances of the restaurant leaving a good impression are pretty low," McNiece says. "People have options. They can just click on some Spotify playlist and have it play forever. But for us it's about having a unique personality and creating that unique experience."

What matters is the flavor—or should we say "good taste"?

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♈ ARIES (March 21-April 19): You may sometimes reach a point where you worry that conditions are not exactly right to pursue your dreams or fulfill your holy quest. Does that describe your current situation? If so, I invite you to draw inspiration from Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), who's regarded as one of history's foremost novelists. Here's how one observer described Cervantes during the time he was working on his masterpiece, the novel titled *Don Quixote*: "shabby, obscure, disreputable, pursued by debts, with only a noisy tenement room to work in." Cervantes dealt with imperfect conditions just fine.

♉ TAURUS (April 20-May 20): "True success is figuring out your life and career so you never have to be around jerks," says Taurus filmmaker, actor, and author John Waters. I trust that you have been intensely cultivating that kind of success in the last few weeks, Taurus—and that you will climax this wondrous accomplishment with a flourish during the next few weeks. You're on the verge of achieving a new level of mastery in the art of immersing yourself in environments that bring out the best in you.

♊ GEMINI (May 21-June 20): I would love for you to become more powerful, Gemini—not necessarily in the sense of influencing the lives of others, but rather in the sense of managing your own affairs with relaxed confidence and crisp competence. What comes to mind when I urge you to expand your self-command and embolden your ambition? Is there an adventure you could initiate that would bring out more of the swashbuckler in you?

♋ CANCER (June 21-July 22): For my Cancerian readers in the Southern Hemisphere, this oracle will be in righteous alignment with the natural flow of the seasons. That's because February is the hottest, laziest, most spacious time of year in that part of the world—a logical moment to take a lavish break from the daily rhythm and escape on a vacation or pilgrimage designed to provide relaxation and renewal. Which is exactly what I'm advising for all of the earth's Cancerians, including those in the Northern Hemisphere. So for those of you above the equator, I urge you to consider thinking like those below the equator. If you can't get away, make a blanket fort in your home and pretend. Or read a book that takes you on an imaginary journey. Or hang out at an exotic sanctuary in your hometown.

♌ LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Leo author Walter Scott (1771-1832) was a pioneer in the genre of the historical novel. His stories were set in various eras of the Scottish past. In those pre-telephone and pre-internet days, research was a demanding task. Scott traveled widely to gather tales from keepers of the oral tradition. In accordance with current astrological omens, Leo, I recommend that you draw inspiration from Scott's old-fashioned approach. Seek out direct contact with the past. Put yourself in the physical presence of storytellers and elders. Get first-hand knowledge about historical events that will inspire your thoughts about the future of your life story.

♍ VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Over a period of 40 years, the artist Rembrandt (1606-1663) gazed into a mirror as he created more than 90 self-portraits—about 10 percent of his total work. Why? Art scholars don't have a definitive answer. Some think he did self-portraits because they sold well. Others say that because he worked so slowly, he himself was the only person he could get to model for long periods. Still others believe this was his way of cultivating self-knowledge, equivalent to an author writing an autobiography. In the coming weeks, I highly recommend that you engage in your personal equivalent of extended mirror-gazing. It's a favorable time to understand yourself better.

♎ LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): From author Don DeLillo's many literary works, I've gathered five quotes to serve as your guideposts in the coming weeks. These observations are all in synchronicity alignment with your current needs. 1. Sometimes a thing that's hard is hard because you're doing it wrong. 2. You have to break through the structure of your own stonework habit just to make yourself listen. 3. Something is always happening, even on the quietest days and deep into the night, if you stand a while and look. 4. The world is full of abandoned meanings. In the commonplace, I find unexpected themes and intensities. 5. What we are reluctant to touch often seems the very fabric of our salvation.

♏ SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): "I remember a time when a cabbage could sell itself just by being a cabbage," wrote Scorpio author Jean Giraudoux (1882-1944). "Nowadays it's no good being a cabbage—unless you have an agent and pay him a commission." He was making the point that for us humans, it's not enough to simply become good at a skill and express that skill; we need to hire a publicist or marketing wizard or distributor to make sure the world knows about our offerings. Generally, I agree with Giraudoux's assessment. But I think that right now it applies to you only minimally. The coming weeks will be one of those rare times when your interestingness will shine so brightly, it will naturally attract its deserved attention. Your motto, from industrialist Henry J. Kaiser: "When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt."

♐ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): When he was 29 years old, Sagittarian composer Ludwig Beethoven published his *String Quartet, Op. 18, No. 4*. Most scholars believe that the piece was an assemblage of older material he had created as a young man. A similar approach might work well for you in the coming weeks, Sagittarius. I invite you to consider the possibility of repurposing tricks and ideas that weren't quite ripe when you first used them. Recycling yourself makes good sense.

♑ CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Are there parts of your life that seem to undermine other parts of your life? Do you wish there was greater harmony between your heart and your head, between your giving and your taking, between your past and your future? Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could infuse your cautiousness with the wildness of your secret self? I bring these questions to your attention, Capricorn, because I suspect you're primed to address them with a surge of innovative energy. Here's my prediction: Healing will come as you juxtapose apparent opposites and unite elements that have previously been unconnected.

♒ AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): When he was 19, the young poet Robert Graves joined the British army to fight in World War I. Two years later, the *Times of London* newspaper reported that he had been killed at the Battle of the Somme in France. But it wasn't true. Graves was very much alive, and continued to be for another 69 years. During that time, he wrote 55 books of poetry, 18 novels, and 55 other books. I'm going to be bold and predict that this story can serve as an apt metaphor for your destiny in the coming weeks and months. Some danger or situation or influence that you believed to be gone will in fact have a very long second life filled with interesting developments.

♓ PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): If you're like most of us, you harbor desires for experiences that might be gratifying in some ways but draining in others. If you're like most of us, you may on occasion get attached to situations that are mildly interesting, but divert you from situations that could be amazingly interesting and enriching. The good news, Pisces, is that you are now in a phase when you have maximum power to wean yourself from these wasteful tendencies. The coming weeks will be a favorable time to identify your two or three most important and exciting longings—and take a sacred oath to devote yourself to them above all other wishes and hopes.

CROSSWORD

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63					64					65			
66					67					68			

AND ANOTHER THING

BY BRENDAN EMMETT QUIGLEY

Across

- 1 “Mind. Blown”
- 5 Key-changing tool for guitarists
- 9 Feminine suffix
- 13 Audience, in a phrase
- 14 Suez Canal ship
- 15 Grooming brand that sounds like a word meaning “bullwark”
- 16 Rescue op
- 17 Pub employee who gets people to spend freely
- 18 Big test
- 19 Hazing event
- 22 The Knicks play there, for short

- 23 “Quit ___ jibber jabber!”
- 24 Singleton
- 25 Neither
- 26 Netflix and ___
- 28 Physique
- 30 Awards similar to Nebulas
- 32 UFC’s president White
- 33 Barbecue application
- 34 Gun, at the gym
- 35 Request to a bartender, and what happens once here, and twice in 19- and 55-Across

- 40 They’ve mastered faster than light speed travel, seemingly
- 41 Michigan State football coach Tucker
- 42 Upholstery problems
- 44 Slithering killer
- 47 Montreal hockey player, fondly
- 48 Took first place
- 49 Your pick of
- 50 John of London
- 52 Detroit labor grp.

- 54 Texas sch.
- 55 Specific deets
- 59 “E! News” host Parker
- 60 “Mi hombre!”
- 61 “The Two Towers” soldiers
- 63 “Moses and ___” (Schoenberg opera)
- 64 Did some of the dishes
- 65 In need of getting some sun
- 66 Church members
- 67 Did so well as to warrant a chef’s kiss
- 68 Glasses, jokingly

Down

- 1 Very insignificant
- 2 “Great Expectations” spinster
- 3 Citrus-flavored soda
- 4 PC text letter format
- 5 Leftover Cuban, say
- 6 Landed
- 7 “I’ve nothing more to say”
- 8 Crease-resistant dress material
- 9 Water holder
- 10 Getting ready for an uplifting trip?
- 11 “Right! I knew I forgot it!”
- 12 Big name in glue
- 14 Award given out by the American Theatre Wing
- 20 “I’m outta here,” in texts
- 21 ___ jacket
- 22 Golden Arches co. on Wall Street
- 27 Anthony Davis, e.g.

- 29 2020 Best Spoken Word Album winner
- 31 Soccer shorts company
- 33 “How the Other Half Lives” author Jacob
- 34 Alternative to ProtonMail
- 36 “And others”
- 37 Polished up, as an app
- 38 Dryer collector
- 39 Inner circle, in astronomy
- 43 Letter run that’s a man’s name
- 44 Quick siesta
- 45 Available for work
- 46 “I’m outta here”
- 47 Capturer of some embarrassing comments
- 48 “Jojo Rabbit” setting, for short
- 51 Capital city originally called Bytown
- 53 “Sunday Night Baseball” analyst, for short
- 56 Indian flat breads
- 57 “Zomg!”
- 58 Sports car roofs
- 62 Activity for busy people?

Last Week’s Answer

S	T	A	M	P	S		J	U	I	C	E	B	O	X
T	O	T	E	R			E	S	C	A	L	A	D	E
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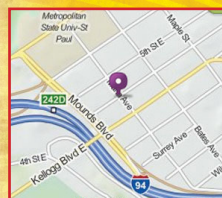
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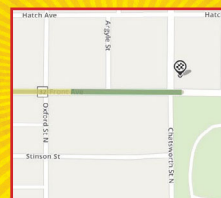
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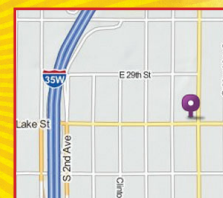
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Spit and Polish

How do I trick myself into liking blowjobs?



Dan Savage

I'm a 31-year-old cis bisexual woman. I'm hetero-romantic and in a monogamish relationship with a man. We play with other people together. I've never liked giving blowjobs because I was taught that girls who give blowjobs are "sluts." Phrases that are meant to be insulting like "You suck," "Suck it," "Go suck a dick," etc. created a strong association in my mind between blowjobs and men degrading women. (Men take what they want, and women get used and called sluts.) As such, I never sucked much dick—and if I did, it was only briefly and never to completion. I also find spit and come kind of gross. Even when I get really wet during sex, it's a bit of a turnoff, and I hate that it makes me feel gross and wish I could change my thinking around it. Early in our relationship, my husband noticed the lack of blowjobs and confronted me, saying they were really important to him. At first I felt a little insecure about being inadequate in this area, but then I decided to do some research, because I honestly thought it wasn't just me and most women don't like giving blowjobs. (Because how could they? It's so demeaning!) But I learned lots of my female friends enjoy giving blowjobs—they like being in control, giving a partner pleasure, etc.—so I googled ways to start liking blowjobs and I've started to get into them! It's great! Except I still don't like when he comes in my mouth or if a blowjob gets super spitty. But my husband loves sloppy blowjobs; he says the lubrication feels good and he enjoys the "dirtiness" of it. If I know he's getting close to coming or if it gets super wet and I have spit all over my face, my gag reflex activates and it's hard to continue. I feel like I'm at an impasse. I want to give him the blowjobs he wants, but I don't know how to get around (or hopefully start enjoying!) the super-sloppy-through-to-completion blowjobs he likes. Do you have any advice?

SLOPPY ORAL ALWAYS KEEPS
ERECTIONS DRENCHED

You play with other people together, SOAKED, but have you tried actively observing while your husband gets a sloppy blowjob from someone who really enjoys giving them? If someone else was blowing your husband while you made out with him or sat on his face or played with his tits or

whatever might enhance the experience for him... and you watched another woman choke that dick down... you might come to appreciate what's in it for the person giving the sloppy blowjob.

Most people who were taught that girls who give blowjobs are sluts were also taught that open relationships are wrong and women who have sex with other women are going to hell. You got over what you were taught about monogamish relationships and being bisexual years ago, SOAKED, and recently got over what you were taught about women who enjoy sucking cock. While some people have physical limitations they can't overcome—some gag reflexes are unconquerable—watching someone enjoy something you don't can make you want to experience it yourself.

But even if your observations don't trigger a desire to get down there and get sloppy and swallow his load yourself, your husband would be getting the kind of blowjobs he enjoys most and you would be an intrinsic part of them. If you set up the date, you'd be making them happen, even if you weren't doing them. And if you were into the scenario and/or the other woman—if the whole thing got you off, not just off the hook—then there would be something in it for you, too.

And take it from me, SOAKED, to be kissed with both passion and gratitude by, say, a husband (ahem) who's really enjoying something someone else is doing for/to him—whether or not that something is something you also enjoy doing for/to him from time to time—is really fucking hot. So even if you never come around—even if sloppy blowjobs are something you have to outsource permanently—you and your husband can enjoy years of sloppy blowjobs together, with the assistance of a series of very special (and very slutty) guest stars. And you can get always get those blowjobs started—the non-sloppy, non-spitty initial phase—before passing the baton off to your guest star.

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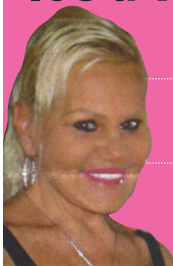
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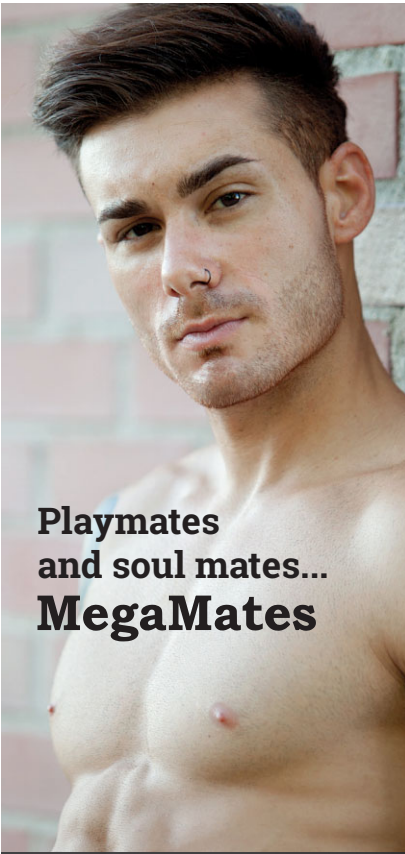
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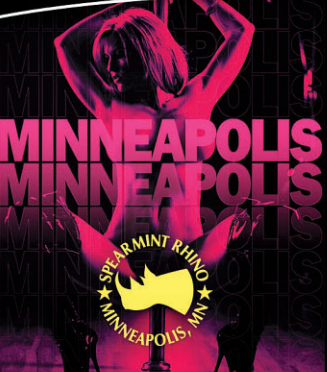
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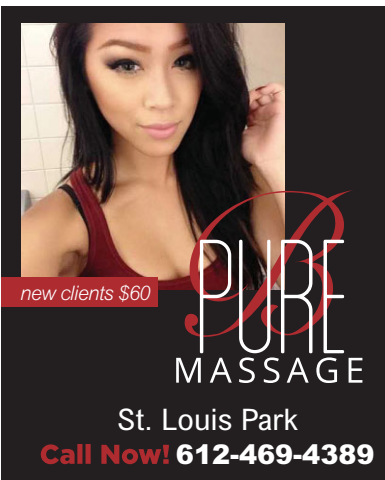
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